

## THE SHEARIN GROUP LEADERSHIP TRAINING TIPS

### Five Tips to Keep your Company Task Force on Task



**As private and public sector organizations grow and change, internal committees become an increasingly important way to integrate different parts of the business and get things done.**

While internal committees come in many forms, and can be called task forces or working groups or committees, they are essentially a way to bring together a mix of people with different skills and perspectives to address corporate-wide priorities and cut across departments and geographies.

Internal committees are commonly used to co-ordinate and manage projects, lead strategic priorities, integrate multi-business unit operations, improve employee engagement, or quite simply manage the overall [leadership of a business](#). When managed well, internal committees can add significant value, strengthen communications, and serve as an agile organizational design practice that most businesses can't do without.

Unfortunately, for many larger, more complex organizations, internal committees are not well managed, resulting in wasted time and energy – and lost opportunities.

In fact, many organizations don't even know how many internal committees they have, let alone what they do and what resources they consume. In the worst of cases, internal committees trip over each other, duplicating and confusing the efforts of other committees as well as core business units.

So, to realize the value and avoid the destructive pitfalls, what are the keys to successful internal committee management? [Here are five tips.](#)

## **1. Know what exists**

Have an inventory of your committees, task forces and working groups, and know how they support the business and complement each other.

Not doing so will run the risk of perpetual confusion, fragmentation and duplication, unknown and misaligned resource allocations, and muted or failed outcomes. To actively manage your company's range of committees, you need a dedicated point-person accountable for their oversight, and responsible for co-ordinating their internal governance.

At one progressive client, this role was actively led by the chief human resources officer, and included quarterly updates to the executive team.

## **2. Make it clear how committees are formed**

It's essential to have clarity through the company as to how committees get created in the first place. Have guidelines for their creation, structure, composition – and how they come to an end. Anything less could result in a “wild west” culture where managers can create committees at any time, with increasing levels of internal dysfunctionality and resource drains as more committees get added to the mix.

One Saskatchewan-based energy company has instituted a simple but formal set of protocols to guide committee creation, resource deployment and performance expectations.

### **3. Have a clear mandate**

To reduce redundancy and improve productivity, committees must be clear about their mandate, roles and responsibilities, and how their recommendations and decisions connect with management processes.

Ideally, each committee should have simply documented terms of reference specifying its objectives, how it works, how it measures its performance, and, most importantly, how it fits into the broader organizational structure.

### **4. Track performance**

Taking the time to plan, measure and understand the level of effort and cost of each committee and of the collective portfolio of all the organization's committees will serve you well.

When this tracking is done, most organizations are initially surprised to see how much time and financial effort they are putting into internal committees. Invariably, these profiles result in portfolio streamlining, better balancing of individual commitments and resource allocations, and greater clarity of committee mandates. In other words, committees suddenly become more efficient and effective, and better complement the broader corporate structure.

### **5. Hold committee members accountable**

Key to the success of your internal committees is formally recognizing and holding people individually accountable for their committee commitments and results. This is especially important since committee participation is usually a part-time effort over and above a staff member's full-time job.

While most employees will have an interest in participating on a committee, other competing priorities and commitments can be distracting. Careful management helps to balance these competing interests and focus efforts.

Companies can see an immediate benefit when they begin to take a formal and practical approach to managing their internal committees.

In one particular client case, a newly appointed CEO suspected that the number and mix of internal committees simply hadn't been managed, with the costs and complexities far outweighing the benefits to the business.

With a comprehensive inventory and an assessment of related costs and benefits, the CEO quickly made changes. This began with the recognition that while internal committees were useful, there needed to be executive commitment to formally managing them as a strategic portfolio and as part of the company's organization design. While the transition to formal and better portfolio management of internal committees took time, this company made them a priority and is now reaping the benefits.

Internal committees can be a useful [organization strategy](#), but if poorly managed, they can create decision-making and organizational confusion. Thoughtful and practical management of internal committees will guarantee a higher rate of return.